



*Promoting higher quality*

**The Quality Assurance Agency  
for Higher Education**

## Subject Review Report

November 2000 Q44/2001

Chester College of Higher Education  
Theology and Religious Studies

## Reviewing the Quality of Education

The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) was established in 1997. It has responsibility for assessing the quality of higher education (HE) in England and Northern Ireland from 1 October 1997 under the terms of a contract with the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE).

The purposes of subject review are: to ensure that the public funding provided is supporting education of an acceptable quality, to provide public information on that education through the publication of reports such as this one, and to provide information and insights to encourage improvements in education.

The main features of the subject review method are:

### Review against Aims and Objectives

The HE sector in England and Northern Ireland is diverse. The HEFCE funds education in over 140 institutions of HE and 75 further education (FE) colleges. These institutions vary greatly in size, subject provision, history and statement of purpose. Each has autonomy to determine its institutional mission, and its specific aims and objectives at subject level.

Subject review is carried out in relation to the subject aims and objectives set by each provider. It measures the extent to which each subject provider is successful in achieving its aims and objectives.

Readers should be cautious in making comparisons of subject providers solely on the basis of subject review outcomes. Comparisons between providers with substantively different aims and objectives would have little validity.

### Review of the Student Learning Experience and Student Achievement

Subject review examines the wide range of influences that shape the learning experiences and achievements of students. It covers the full breadth of teaching and learning activities, including: direct observation of classroom/seminar/workshop/ laboratory situations, the methods of reviewing students' work, students' work and achievements, the curriculum, staff and staff development, the application of resources (library, information technology, equipment), and student support and guidance. This range of activities is captured within a core set of six aspects of provision, each of which is graded on a four-point scale (1 to 4), in ascending order of merit.

The aspects of provision are:

- Curriculum Design, Content and Organisation
- Teaching, Learning and Assessment
- Student Progression and Achievement
- Student Support and Guidance
- Learning Resources
- Quality Management and Enhancement.

### Peer Review

Reviewers are academic and professional peers in the subject. Most are members of the academic staff of UK HE institutions. Others are drawn from industry, commerce, private practice and the professions.

### Combination of Internal and External Processes

The review method has two main processes:

- Preparation by the subject provider of a self-assessment in the subject, based on the provider's own aims and objectives, and set out in the structure provided by the core set of aspects of provision.
- A three-day review visit carried out by a team of reviewers. The review team grades each of the aspects of provision to make a graded profile of the provision, and derives from that profile an overall judgement. Provided that each aspect is graded 2 or better, the quality of the education is approved.

### Published Reports

In addition to individual review reports, the QAA will publish subject overview reports at the conclusion of reviews in a subject. The subject overview reports are distributed widely to schools and FE colleges, public libraries and careers services. Both the review reports and the subject overview reports are available in hard copy and are also on the world-wide web (see back cover for details).

## Introduction

1. This Report presents the findings of a review in November 2000 of the quality of education in theology and religious studies provided by Chester College of Higher Education.

2. Chester College of Higher Education was founded by the Church of England in 1839 as the first purpose-built teacher-training college in the United Kingdom. It is now an accredited college of the University of Liverpool with 4,850 full-time equivalent (FTE) students. It is located largely on a self-contained campus close to the city centre with a few departments housed in buildings a few minutes walk from the campus. While the training of teachers remains an important activity, the academic portfolio also contains Arts and Humanities, Nursing and Midwifery, and Science and Health.

3. The Department of Theology and Religious Studies is part of the School of Arts and Humanities, with 115 FTE undergraduates and 50 FTE postgraduates. At the time of the visit there were, because of unusual circumstances, 7.5 FTE academic staff and 3.75 FTE support staff; by the end of the academic year the pattern will be the longer term one of 9.8 FTE academic staff and two FTE support staff. At undergraduate level, theology and religious studies is taught within three structures: the BA Single Honours framework, the BA Combined Subjects framework and a Specialised Single Honours Degree. The latter (BTh) is available part-time as well as full-time. There are also open-access Level 1 awards, the Church Colleges' Certificates. At postgraduate level, one programme is taught part-time or full-time, with day-time and/or evening sessions. Two postgraduate programmes are available through distance learning. All the postgraduate programmes have post-experience entry at Level 3 on which students may progress to masters level.

4. The following provision forms the basis of the review:

### *Church Colleges' Certificate programmes*

- Church Colleges' Certificate in Religious Studies
- Church Colleges' Certificate in Church School Studies
- Church Colleges' Certificate in Ministry
- Church Colleges' Certificate in Theology
- Church Colleges' Certificate in Theology and Ministry.

### *Undergraduate Degree Programmes*

- BTh Single Honours, Theology (full-time and part-time)
- BA Single Honours, Theology and Religious Studies
- BA (Honours) Combined Subjects.

### *Post-Experience/Postgraduate Degree Programmes*

- Certificate and Diploma of Advance Studies, Applied Theology
- MTh/Postgraduate Diploma/Postgraduate Certificate, Applied Theology
- Certificate and Diploma of Advanced Studies (DAS), Adult Education with Theological Reflection
- MA/Postgraduate Diploma/Postgraduate Certificate, Adult Education with Theological Reflection
- Certificate and Diploma of Advanced Studies, Church School Education
- MA/Postgraduate Diploma/Postgraduate Certificate, Church School Education.

5. The statistical data in this Introduction are provided by the institution itself. The aims and objectives are presented overleaf. These also are provided by the institution.

## The Aims and Objectives for Theology and Religious Studies

### Aims

Within the wider College Mission, the Department has aims informing and applying to all its programmes of study. The Department seeks to:

1. provide flexible programmes and pathways of study in Theology and Religious Studies (TRS) - award-bearing, vocational and for personal development - for full-time and part-time students, offered in different modes of delivery and with the established use of Accreditation of Prior Learning and Credit Accumulation and Transfer systems which widen access to them;
2. provide effective, structured learning opportunities for undergraduate and postgraduate study in Theology and Religious Studies which promote the development of knowledge and understanding, research skills, skills of analysis and interpretation, skills of coherent argument, skills of communication and presentation;
3. provide additional opportunities, in specific programmes and modules, for personal and professional application;
4. foster learning and research related to the academic, personal and vocational concerns of its students and staff;
5. offer programmes and pathways in order to meet regional and local needs for lay and ordained ministerial education and, in collaboration with other agencies, to meet particular national needs in adult education and Church School education;
6. provide programmes which develop skills and knowledge appropriate to preparation for postgraduate study or further research, and to a range of vocations and careers, particularly in Christian ministry and in teaching.

### INTRODUCTION TO OBJECTIVES

1. The learning experiences and learning outcomes below apply to all programmes of study, and additional outcomes for particular programmes, pathways and awards are further specified. Programmes which share the same learning outcomes are differentiated by core disciplines.
2. The generic learning outcomes constitute the complete learning outcomes for pathways and programmes which include just two, three or four TRS modules, namely, Church Colleges' Certificates at Level 1,

Subsidiary Subject pathways at levels 1 and 2, BA Combined Subject Minor and Equal at Level 3, Certificates of Advanced Studies at level 3 and postgraduate Certificates at Level M.

3. Two factors are key to most of the additional learning outcomes specific to particular awards: pathways including a profile of six or eight modules have a learning outcome relating to the range of skills demonstrated; pathways including a dissertation have a learning outcome about research work.
4. The three generic learning outcomes at each level summarise and relate to, respectively: knowledge and understanding; subject-specific and intellectual skills; and transferable skills. As the Department responds to the TRS Benchmark Statement, module learning outcomes will be reviewed and developed during 2000-2001, and these generic learning outcomes may need to be modified accordingly.
5. The 'skills appropriate to the disciplines of the programme' referred to in the generic learning outcomes below are identified in some module learning outcomes. The Department has initiated a revision of learning experiences and learning outcomes relating to skills in order to articulate and specify these further, and to monitor the cumulative profile of skills in programmes and pathways. This is ongoing and to be undertaken in the light of the Benchmark statement.

### Objectives

#### Level 1

Learning is predominantly tutor-designed and guided, and students are offered opportunities for individual initiative within this framework, which provides groundwork in subject-specific and transferable study skills and encouragement to communicate accurately.

Students will be assessed on their ability to:

- demonstrate knowledge and understanding of basic terminology and key ideas in Theology and Religious Studies;
- demonstrate basic skills appropriate to Theology and Religious Studies, including the exercise of an open and questioning approach to familiar and new material;
- express ideas with clarity, accuracy and appropriate reference to sources.

#### Level 2

Learning design remains largely tutor-guided and students are encouraged to work in collaboration with tutors and fellow-students. There is opportunity for

consolidation and development of appropriate study skills and for experiencing a range of appropriate methods for tasks in hand.

*Students will be assessed on their ability to:*

- recognise, analyse and relate appropriately to one another, ideas in Theology and Religious Studies;
- demonstrate further skills required in Theology and Religious Studies, including an awareness of conflicting views;
- formulate a coherent argument grounded in reading with an appropriate use of data and evidence.

*Additional Outcome for Diplomas of Higher Education, Theology, and Theology and Religious Studies, Level 2*

- demonstrate an ability to audit their own skills and understand their development as a learner.

### Level 3

Students develop a greater responsibility for their own learning, both independent and collaborative. There is a consolidation of appropriate study skills and their application to independent enquiry. There is encouragement to articulate personal engagement and response in the context of respect for views of others.

*Students will be assessed on their ability to:*

- analyse complex ideas in the disciplines of the programme; and evaluate them appropriately;
- apply to independent enquiry a range of skills appropriate to the disciplines of the programme;
- formulate a coherent argument deriving from a range of reading or reading and practice, and comment critically upon such argument.

*Additional Outcome for single honours degrees, BTh, and BA TRS, and the DAS awards, Level 3*

- apply to independent enquiry a wide range of skills appropriate to Theology and Religious Studies;

*Additional Outcome for single honours degrees, BTh, and BA TRS, and also BA Combined Subject Major and Equal if a Dissertation is undertaken in TRS, Level 3*

- undertake research work in such a way that it is planned, implemented and interpreted with appropriate modes of enquiry, due regard for evidence and the communication of its outcomes.

### Level M

Students have a large measure of responsibility for their own learning: autonomy and interdependence are key to the learning experiences. A wide range of developed

study skills can be drawn on. There is encouragement to interrelate personal perspectives with concepts deriving from publication and practice.

*Students will be assessed on their ability to:*

- analyse, synthesise and critically reflect on complex ideas in the disciplines of the programme, and evaluate and apply them appropriately in context;
- demonstrate a facility with a range of skills appropriate to the disciplines of the programme in independent enquiry;
- formulate a coherent argument which derives from a range of reading or reading and practice, and which goes beyond unchallenged reiteration of views held before the research was undertaken.

*Additional Outcome for Postgraduate Diploma awards, and MTh and MAs, Level M*

- apply to independent enquiry a full range of skills appropriate to the disciplines of the programme.

*Additional Outcomes for MTh and MAs, Level M*

- evaluate a range of approaches and methodologies to the study of the disciplines of the programme;
- undertake research work in such a way that it is planned, implemented and interpreted with a due regard for appropriate modes of enquiry, a critical evaluation of evidence and the communication of its outcomes.

## Summary of the Review

6. The graded profile in paragraph 7 indicates the extent to which the student learning experience and achievement demonstrate that the aims and objectives set by the subject provider are being met. The tests and the criteria applied by the reviewers are these:

### Aspects of provision

1. Curriculum Design, Content and Organisation
2. Teaching, Learning and Assessment
3. Student Progression and Achievement
4. Student Support and Guidance
5. Learning Resources
6. Quality Management and Enhancement.

### Tests to be applied

To what extent do the student learning experience and student achievement, within this aspect of provision, contribute to meeting the objectives set by the subject provider?

Do the objectives set, and the level of attainment of those objectives, allow the aims set by the subject provider to be met?

### Scale points

1

The aims and/or objectives set by the subject provider are not met; there are major shortcomings that must be rectified.

2

This aspect makes an acceptable contribution to the attainment of the stated objectives, but significant improvement could be made.

The aims set by the subject provider are broadly met.

3

This aspect makes a substantial contribution to the attainment of the stated objectives; however, there is scope for improvement.

The aims set by the subject provider are substantially met.

4

This aspect makes a full contribution to the attainment of the stated objectives.

The aims set by the subject provider are met.

7. The grades awarded as a result of the review are:

Aspects of provision	Grade
Curriculum Design, Content and Organisation	3
Teaching, Learning and Assessment	3
Student Progression and Achievement	4
Student Support and Guidance	4
Learning Resources	4
Quality Management and Enhancement	4

8. The quality of education in theology and religious studies at Chester College of Higher Education is **approved**.

## The Quality of Education

### Curriculum Design, Content and Organisation

9. The Department amply fulfils its aim to provide flexible pathways of study for full and part-time students. The admissions policy allows for wide access across the various certificate, undergraduate and postgraduate programmes. Although starting points and goals differ considerably between the various constituencies admitted on Level 1 courses, these are dealt with through both the personal academic tutor (PAT) scheme, and the introductory study skills course. There is a close and fruitful collaboration with partner institutions: the Northern Ordination Course, the Chester Diocese, the Church of England General Synod Board of Education and the Anglican Church Colleges of England and Wales.

10. There is a lively research culture evident in the Department. This enriches a number of taught modules, and invigorates the curriculum as a whole. Contemporary theology, new spiritualities, and Bible and culture are examples of areas of teaching where new ideas contribute to the curriculum.

11. The four Church Colleges' certificates offer flexible programmes, comprising three Level 1 modules, in vocational and academic areas of study - often to students that have not studied academically for some time. After successful completion, students are able to transfer the credits earned towards the part or full-time BTh or another first degree programme.

12. The BTh Specialised Single Honours degree is a coherent scheme of study with core modules built into each level of the programme, providing clear indications of progression from Level 1 through to Level 3. It covers the discipline in terms of breadth and depth, based on core foundational and contemporary modules. It culminates in a final-year dissertation that assesses key and subject-specific skills appropriate to the degree.

13. The BA Single Honours and Combined Subjects programmes comprise three strands: theology, biblical studies and religious studies. Although recent documentation produced by the Department indicates that serious attention is being directed to the provision of religious studies, it is evident that, within the current programmes, religious studies is not as coherently embedded into the curriculum as are the other strands. The Level 1 introductory module in religious studies, for example, currently introduces the subject of religious studies in one week of teaching before moving on to detailed work on particular religious traditions. Whereas

theology and biblical studies are progressively offered across the three levels, with modules that gradually develop appropriate skills, methodologies, theoretical awareness and knowledge, such progression is not evident in the case of religious studies.

14. Work-based learning, available to students at Level 2, is highly valued and provides excellent preparation for the world of work and enhancement of skills developed and encouraged during the department's programmes. It is well integrated into the undergraduate degree programmes and offers students a wide range of options in relation to their academic and career paths. Students are carefully advised and supported at each stage of their placements. Evidence from former students reflects how this aspect of the curriculum has enhanced their careers and personal development.

15. The three pairs of post-experience and postgraduate programmes in applied theology, adult education with theological reflection, and church school education, are each offered at the certificate, diploma and masters level. These programmes offer a variety of vocational and educational opportunities and reflect the professional needs of the constituencies they serve.

16. This aspect makes a substantial contribution to the attainment of the stated objectives; however, there is scope for improvement. The aims set by the subject provider are substantially met.

Curriculum Design, Content and Organisation:  
Grade 3.

### Teaching, Learning and Assessment

17. The Department aims to provide an open and flexible route into higher education, which is designed to develop pro-active, autonomous lifelong learners. The department has been notably successful in its comprehensive development and communication of a teaching and learning strategy to achieve this aim.

18. Modes of delivery include taught classes, open resourced learning on site, and distance learning. Teaching methods include lectures, tutorial and group discussion work, supported by audiovisual media and the internet. The common teaching of students on modules that contribute to a variety of certificate, undergraduate and post-experience and postgraduate programmes brings together students of different ages and backgrounds in a beneficial manner. The systematic integration of internet sites into module resources and monitoring of the use made of these by students illustrates an alert response to developments within approaches to teaching and learning.

19. The reviewers observed 15 teaching and learning sessions, which represented all levels of the programmes within the provision. The majority of these classes were planned as two-hour sessions with combined lecture and discussion elements, both small group and plenary, and were generally supported by detailed handouts. The overwhelming majority of these sessions succeeded in attaining their planned learning outcomes, and several were judged to exemplify best practice, on the basis of the clarity, commitment and enthusiasm of the lecturer and the variety of activities involved in the session. In some of these classes, however, student discussion was of a general nature with little evidence of preparatory reading. The small number of less successful classes were less well-judged in their pace and pitch, again with generalised discussion unsupported by prescribed reading.

20. Independent learning is encouraged by a progressive reduction in directed learning. Opportunities to negotiate assignment titles at all levels of study allow students to pursue their interests, but there was evidence that not all students followed departmental advice in consulting appropriate tutors when framing assignments. Module handbooks at levels 2 and 3 include a valuable, self-diagnostic skills audit. Students are encouraged to assess their own performance on the assignment cover sheet and are aided in this, and in the preparation of their coursework, by the detailed assessment criteria included in all module handbooks.

21. At least 25 per cent of all examination scripts and coursework items chosen from a complete batch are double-marked. All dissertations are double-marked internally and seen by the external examiner who is also given access to all coursework items. In some of the coursework the reviewers sampled, including work at post-experience/postgraduate level, they noted a tendency to over-reward writing that fails to achieve the standard of critical analysis appropriate to the level of study.

22. In accordance with departmental guidelines, coursework is returned promptly. External examiners have regularly commended the quality of the summary comments on the cover sheets attached to assignments. The retention of assignments for the final assessment of modules, however, has resulted in the return of cover sheets alone as the primary means to provide written feedback to students on their assignments. The sharing of close, detailed comment and correction, therefore, has been dependent upon individual students or members of staff arranging tutorials when this can take place. Close comment of this sort on the essays sampled was often found to be limited, and sometimes non-existent.

23. This aspect makes a substantial contribution to the attainment of the stated objectives; however, there is scope for improvement. The aims set by the subject provider are substantially met.

Teaching, Learning and Assessment:  
Grade 3.

## **Student Progression and Achievement**

24. The full-time undergraduate programmes are suffering from a marginal decline in numbers, but this has been complemented by the introduction of a range of part-time, certificate and postgraduate programmes. Over the last few years the GCE A-Level points score for students entering the full-time undergraduate programmes has remained relatively constant: the score for the most recent cohort is 12.7 points. Of the entrants, 22 per cent are mature students. There is a low number of male students (27 per cent) and ethnic minority students (10 per cent). These figures, however, reflect the normal profile for the subject and the catchment area of the college respectively. It is clear that the Department is fully achieving its aim of widening participation and serving its region.

25. Of the students who entered the full-time programmes taught by the Department in 1997, 84 per cent progressed to Level 2. The completion rate for undergraduates is satisfactory, with the numbers of entrants successfully graduating from the subject standing at 75 per cent. In addition, 5 per cent who transferred out succeeded in graduating in the other subject. Of those graduating in this subject, 45 per cent obtained Upper Second class honours. This success in the light of the number of mature entrants and the average GCE A-Level entry points score is indicative of added-value.

26. The reviewers examined a range of student work, nearly all of which was at least of an acceptable quality, while the best demonstrated insight and imagination. Observation of students in lectures and seminars revealed that they were generally lively and eager to participate, but on some occasions had not done the preparation for the discussions expected of them. Their written and oral work, together with their participation in group work, showed that they had largely achieved the knowledge and understanding and the transferable and subject-specific skills required of them, or were in the process of doing so at the relevant stage of their studies. Both current and former students expressed considerable enthusiasm about their programmes of study and the Department.

27. The first-destination data of the cohort graduating in 1999 demonstrates that students had been well prepared for employment or for further study, with some 66 per



cent being in work and another 23 per cent going on to further study. Both current and former mature students expressed satisfaction with the critical skills attained, and the knowledge and understanding gained during their studies. They emphasised that they had grown in self-confidence and had enhanced their self-esteem.

28. The completion rate for the taught part-time postgraduate programme is satisfactory, through a good strategy of granting differentiated awards. Of the 1995 cohort 42 per cent completed successfully, whilst a further 43 per cent are still on course. The 15 per cent non-completion rate is largely attributable to career and other non-academic commitments brought to bear over the six-year period available to students to complete their masters degree.

29. This aspect makes a full contribution to the attainment of the stated objectives. The aims set by the subject provider are met.

Student Progression and Achievement:  
Grade 4.

### **Student Support and Guidance**

30. The College has a strong sense of community and pastoral care, fostered by its Christian foundation and its relatively small size. Students within the department speak of a supportive and encouraging learning environment. The location and layout of the Department's building further aid the feeling of intimacy within the department, and the approachability of the staff.

31. There is an extensive and impressive range of pastoral support services available from the Department, including student peer mentoring, and from the excellent central Student Guidance and Support Service (SGSS). The Students' Union, the medical centre and the chaplaincy also play significant parts in meeting student welfare needs. In addition to benefiting from these agencies, students from the Department make a significant contribution to some of them.

32. Admission and induction programmes for students are shared with the SGSS, which leads for full-time students, with the Department leading for part-time students, through its part-time programmes administrator. Action plans in admission and induction programmes have been implemented recently and are to be applauded. Newly devised induction programmes for part-time students have been well attended and received, but there is some scope for this provision to be further strengthened, particularly for students not based at Chester.

33. The College's PAT system functions well, especially for full-time students, who speak very highly of the scheme. Students are able to see their tutors at

advertised times and feel free to approach tutors at other times besides. Students may, and do, receive additional help from module tutors. For open-learning students, email contact is encouraged and is particularly important.

34. There is a range of clear and helpful guides and handbooks, which are freely advertised and easily available to students. During the induction programme, full-time students receive a hard copy of the appropriate programme handbook and the College's student handbook is available on the intranet (where any updates are posted). The Department also issues handbooks for the first core module during induction. Part-time and open-learning students are inducted by their programme leaders and receive the College CD-ROM.

35. The Department requires all its full-time students to take a module in study skills. This is optional (though strongly encouraged) for part-time students. All students are tutored by their PAT for this module, which plays an important role in strengthening the relationship between student and tutor. A named member of staff within the Department, responsible for specific needs liaises with central services' Specific Needs Co-ordinator to offer support to identified students. This is welcome, especially as there has been reluctance on the part of part-time and mature students to declare specific needs. Students particularly commend the work done in this area, for example, in the identification of dyslexia. Careers advice is the particular responsibility of another departmental staff member (liaising with SGSS).

36. This aspect makes a full contribution to the attainment of the stated objectives. The aims set by the subject provider are met.

Student Support and Guidance:  
Grade 4.

### **Learning Resources**

37. The Department is situated on a pleasant campus with its own dedicated building, Hollybank. It houses the academic staff's offices, the departmental office, two kitchens and two lecture rooms and provides space for teaching in small groups. Space and facilities allow for an impressive learning and social environment for students, especially appreciated by those who travel into Chester, and those who have classes timetabled in the evenings. The information technology (IT) provision has been much improved at Hollybank, with the addition of a study room equipped with PCs having access to the internet. These amenities, greatly valued by both full and part-time students, undoubtedly foster a sense of being part of a learning community.

38. The library staff apply a variety of strategies to ensure that the best use is made of its resources and that student needs remain at the centre of library policy. The Department works closely with library staff to ensure that stocks and the availability of resources reflect the particular needs of the curriculum at any time. This is achieved through the close liaison between academic and library staff, who are kept informed of the bibliographies students will be working from for their studies. However, the academic coherence of the religious studies collection could be monitored more closely. Books from the open shelves can be borrowed for up to three weeks, and those recognised as key texts for current teaching are restricted to one-week loan or short loan. There is also a reference collection for consultation located in the library. These practices ensure that resources circulate well and largely meet student needs. Students commented that they felt they benefited from a good library provision. Library opening hours allow for reasonable access for full-time and part-time students. Students working off campus have access to book boxes through the tutorial system, and Northern Ordination Course students taking modules in Manchester have the use of the library located there. Additionally, staff and students have access to St Deiniol's Library at Hawarden and can benefit from this excellent collection for theological and biblical studies.

39. The College has committed itself to providing one computer for every 12 students. As a result of the creation of the IT suite in the Department's base, however, the ratio of students to computers in the provision under review exceeds this target and is currently 9:1. Students spoke positively about the access they enjoyed to computing equipment and about their induction into the use of IT and the support they had received subsequently. An introduction to the use of IT resources for all categories of students is embedded in the general induction programme. The library and the Department offer additional induction sessions to ensure all part-time students have the opportunity to attend. Induction material is also provided in module handbooks and in CD-ROM format. Students described the help desk and technical support areas as effective and responsive and able to assist students studying both on and off campus. There is a good level of liaison between academic and technical support staff. At a formal level, this is fostered through regular meetings of a users group, including representatives from academic departments and technical staff.

40. The Department maintains a useful and comprehensive website. This includes full details about programmes of study, staff and research interests, information for applicants and links to relevant internet sites.

41. This aspect makes a full contribution to the attainment of the stated objectives. The aims set by the subject provider are met.

Learning Resources:  
Grade 4.

## **Quality Management and Enhancement**

42. There is a well-developed quality assurance system, comprising annual programme, departmental and school reviews, which ensures that the mechanisms for quality management are firmly in place both for the Department and for its partner organisations. The system serves both as a means of quality control and of enhancing the provision in the institution.

43. The student learning experience is carefully monitored. At modular level formal and informal responses are elicited from students. Students are also consulted through a staff-student liaison committee with minuted meetings. Programme teams include student representatives who are trained for their role. There is good evidence that matters raised here are being acted upon and students emphasised that they filled in module questionnaires 'because it makes a difference'. The head of subject reports back on the actions that have been taken to redress any issues. Commendably, any issues that have been raised previously in a module are communicated to the next cohort of students through their module handbook to ensure that a planned resolution is implemented and working.

44. Extensive use is made of external examiners with the relevant expertise to oversee the needs of the programmes. On their first year of appointment they are invited to attend an induction so that they are properly briefed to carry out their function. They submit full and comprehensive annual reports, which have been instructive and helpful to the Department in raising the quality of assessment, resources and delivery of the curriculum. There is, however, some evidence that, despite the conscientious way in which the Department deals with the points raised, the system has not always succeeded in promptly identifying items of major concern or significant themes arising from reports over an extended period of time.

45. The administration of the students on course is thorough and their progress is meticulously tracked. Any reasons for withdrawal are carefully noted and considered.

46. New staff are provided with a comprehensive induction programme. This is delivered through a partnership of central college services and the Department, which provides an experienced mentor. The Department has played a major role within the College in piloting the peer review of teaching. This is

scheduled to become a developing strategy of quality enhancement. Annual development interviews are conducted by the Head of Subject for all staff members. Strategic planning away days, sabbatical leave and protected research time all aid staff development and programme enhancement. All departmental staff are either preparing applications for membership of the Institute of Learning and Teaching or are studying for an MA in Higher Education.

47. The self-assessment was written after extensive discussion within the department and students were clearly familiar with its role and contents. It accurately and recognisably displays the complex nature of the provision and was a sound basis on which to undertake the review process. Additional information was provided before and during the visit. The totality of all this material constituted convincing evidence of self-critical evaluation and analysis of the provision. The reviewers were impressed by the open and responsive attitude of staff in their dealings with the review team.

48. This aspect makes a full contribution to the attainment of the stated objectives. The aims set by the subject provider are met.

Quality Management and Enhancement:  
Grade 4.

## Conclusions

49. The quality of education in theology and religious studies at Chester College of Higher Education is approved. All aspects make at least a substantial contribution to the attainment of the stated objectives and the aims are at least substantially met. The reviewers come to this conclusion, based upon the review visit together with an analysis of the self-assessment and additional data provided.

50. The positive features of the education in theology and religious studies in relation to the aspects of provision include the following:

- a. Provision at undergraduate and postgraduate level that is flexible, well matched to the student profile, and enables students to enter at an appropriate level (paragraphs 9; 11).
  - b. Much effective teaching by enthusiastic and committed members of staff, supported by a clearly articulated teaching and learning strategy (paragraphs 17 to 19).
  - c. A student profile that amply fulfils the subject aim of producing an integrated, academically diverse student population (paragraph 24).
  - d. A caring, learning environment where an excellent relationship between students and subject staff is complemented by support from central services (paragraphs 30 to 33).
  - e. Well-managed library and information technology provision, with excellent arrangements for the induction and subsequent support of students (paragraphs 38; 39).
  - f. A comprehensive range of opportunities for staff development (paragraph 46).
51. The quality of education in theology and religious studies could be improved by addressing the following issues:
- a. The need to improve the way in which skills and knowledge in religious studies are progressively developed (paragraph 13).
  - b. A tendency to over-reward coursework that fails to demonstrate critical analysis appropriate to the level of study (paragraph 21).